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AUTHOR Ramanujam, B. K.
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ABSTRACT

The cross-cultural validity of many models of personality development has been challenged because of their emphasis on Western ideals of individuation, setting goals for oneself, and aggressively pursuing those goals. The model of Hindu society presented in this paper is different. Case studies of two individuals who sought psychological help are used to illustrate the relationship of the individual in Hindu society to the corporate system that determines his goals and shares his destiny. It uses the concept of the individual as operating not alone, but within a social field. This does not mean a total submergence of the person's individuality; rather, it means that obligations to the family and caste come before individual desires and that harmony in relationships must be maintained. When dissonance occurs, restorative measures are available in this system. However, individuals do not always find them personally available or know how to use them even when they are available. In the two cases discussed, these conditions were not met and the individuals used maladaptive strategies instead. (IS)

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Social Change and Personal Crisis:

A View from an Indian Practice

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"Give me the benefit of your convictions, if you have any; but keep your doubts to yourself, for I have enough of my own." Goethe

The Hindu belief system has persisted over millenia, and this continuity is due to the enduring existence of three basic concepts. They are dharma, karma, and samskaras. The concept of dharma holds a central place in the Hindu ethos. There are two notions of dharma: Sanatana Dharma (universal and eternal dharma) which is applicable to all, and Swadharma (one's particular dharma). According to O'Flaherty, "Absolute dharma demands that all of us behave properly in several certain general ways, in addition to the particular requirements of social class and stage of life."¹ Theoretically, there should be no contradiction between the two. O'Flaherty, however, points out the inherent contradiction between the two. She comments, "The problem raised by the conflict between swadharma and eternal dharma was inherent in the very condition of existence, for it is a conflict between the real and ideal."² An average Hindu does

not experience this conflict. He strives to adhere to his swadharma as much as possible and keeps sabatana dharma as an ideal. This is accomplished by emphasizing proper behavior in any given context. This flexibility allows one to bow down before a family deity in home in worship, make obeisance to the village god on one's way to work, visit the temple every day, or perform elaborate rituals. The understanding of religion and dharma may vary widely among all these individuals, but the conviction that one is adhering to the code unifies all who follow the faith. As Marriott has pointed out

Each person is a unique composite of having a personal code for conduct whose observance in appropriate conjunctions will bring him to the particular kind of perfection.³

Mimamsa is defined as, ". . . designation of a philosophical system which is divided into two distinct branches; the former, called Purva or Karma mimamsa, and founded by Gemini, is chiefly concerned with the correct interpretation of Vedic ritual; the latter, called Uttara-Brahma-, or Saririka Mimamsa, but best known under the name of Vedanta, and founded by Badarayana, is a pantheistic system discussing chiefly the nature of Brahman or the universal soul."⁴ However, the reference to Karma as mentioned here is to be found in Uttara Mimamsa. According to Mimamsasas, (600-200 BC), an individual's ultimate destiny and fulfillment in action (kharma) and right action (dharma) is essential for the spiritual wellbeing.⁵ Even Buddha, who

steered away from traditional Hindu dogmas, continued to emphasize dharma, albeit the focus was different. According to him life was bondage and the release could be obtained through right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. He described right conduct as ahimsa (non-violence, satya (truth), aparigraha (not stealing, bramhacarya (celibacy) and anasakti (non attachment to worldly objects). These notions are part of Hindu cognition even today.⁶

The individual's duties vary according to the various stages of life cycle (varnasramadharma). Different models are prescribed for each stage. According to Marriott, "The embodied code (dharma) of a person is understood as comprised of actions, powers and qualities."⁷ Robert A. Levine has suggested that in such a system there are different models or codes available for individuals to choose from.⁸ According to this concept, a code is a system of symbols acceptable to the community which contains assumptions about the nature of reality and the normative rules of behaviour in that reality. The reality varies with each stage of life cycle thus the code also has to modify. for example, a householder has several dharmic obligations. In order to fulfill these obligations he may have to use different codes. As the head of the household he is responsible for nourishing and sustaining the family, and this obligation is part of the "householder code." Also signified in this code are the social obligations toward the jati and the community.

Besides completing these tasks the householder also aspires to his personal evolution which may be represented by samskaras. there may be many other codes and one can switch from one code to another as necessitated by temporal demands. For example, when performing care-taking functions of a householder, the nature of the relationship between various family members and their reciprocal obligations are clearly defined. In the social role, convention clearly determines the exclusiveness and inclusiveness of various kin groups in certain social functions. they include meditation, reciting prayers or joining a bhajana group.

It is very common in the present Indian scene for people to gather for community prayers at regular intervals. This provides a forum for people without distinction of state or creed to come together for devotional activities. The bhajana group may gether in an individual's house, or in a community hall, or in a temple. Milton singer has interpreted bhajana as "...the bhajana is a kind of acting out in dramatic form and bodily gestures an ideal, for the purpose of evoking in men's minds the sentiments and attitudes that may eventually bring their behaviour closer to the ideal".⁹

It is important to note that such a system should not be too rigid. An individual has a relative choice in determining his priorities. This choice is available because

the individual behaviour is affected by the three criteria of desa (the locus where action takes place), kala (temporal dimension) and guna (individual predisposition). People who are comfortable with circumscribed action within a well-known arena can follow injunctions and models to determine their behaviour. For example, the more orthodox can perform a ceremony in its full ritual purity. Others who are less tradition-bound observe the same events through the mediation of a priest with or without personal participation. Those who prefer to move outside the convention, and integrate other systems, can always justify their behaviour within the constraints of desa, kala or guna. In this way tradition becomes integrated with the existing reality through "institutionalization" and "compartmentalization."¹⁰

According to Singer, "The outward traditionalism of Eastern religions masks a wide latitude for individual choice and inner development."¹¹ This should not be construed to mean that any behaviour is acceptable. The tradition has various notions of perfectability. The notion of perfectibility is built into the life cycle. The individual's behaviour should reasonably accord with the ideals set up by the family and jati. Since his actions not only affect him but also the family and jati, the choice has to be exercised within the constraints of accountability to the family, jati, and, finally, the community.

The second major tenet of the traditional Hinduism is

the doctrine of karma. The concept first appears in the Upanisads about 800B.C.¹² According to the law a man's desire determines his actions since he will go in pursuit of his desires. These actions have consequences in the future. An individual can transfer the fruits of his actions to his son. If he dies his sins of commission and omission can be compensated by the good deeds of the son, one reason for desiring a son. The son also plays an important role in family rituals. conversely, the son can also be the recipient of the results of his father's good deeds. This is the popular version of the doctrine of karma. A more abstract conceptualization is offered by Majumdar, who wrote:

The significance of the term karma is equally deep, if not deeper still and this may be realized from the text of Aitreya Aranyaka in which the entire process of cosmos, starting from the creative will of the Prajapati, the lord of beings, is said to reach its consummation in Brahma and Karma, both together denoting the final stage of evolution of the universe of life as self-acting system, guided by supreme intelligence, and endowed with harmony throughout.

Karma is envisaged as the ultimate dynamic for the creation of the universe.

As mentioned earlier, the Mimamsas put a premium on right action which the Bhagavadgita endorsed. There are three paths to self-evolution: Gnana-yoga (through knowledge), Karma-yoga (through action) and Bhakti-yoga (through devotion). Gnana-yoga requires both capacity for

discipline and intellect. Karma-yoga on the other hand is within reach of everyone. Hans Jacobs offers another perspective: "Work for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many (Bahujana-hitaya, Bahujana sukhaya) makes for the forgetfulness of the ego, and is itself a means of self-realization (karma yoga).¹⁴

Samskaras:

A Hindu is brought up to recognize his duties and obligations through a series of life cycle rituals (samskaras). Each ritual marks the beginning of a new phase with its attendant identity, duties and responsibilities. According to Majumdar, samskaras enable a Hindu to be sanctified and lead to self-evolution (atmasamskritih).¹⁵ Each ritual is a symbol of the beginning of a new task of learning to function in a new role. In the new role he has to acquire a new value system as well as a guiding ideology which is interpreted by each individual to discover a personal meaning. The adults in his environment facilitate the passage through the life cycle.¹⁶

Hindu Self:

In the light of the above discussion a legitimate question to ask is if there is a Hindu self different than others. A corollary to this question is, if so, in what way

is it different?

It seems that the Hindu self is "allocentric," i.e., determined by a focus on how others look at you.¹⁷ There is a great need to present a positive social image. This is primarily because the individual's sense of self is based not on "self-regard" but "we-self regard" (as Alan Roland terms it) the we being represented by the family and jati.¹⁸ The social system in which the individual is brought up becomes a significant parameter. This is true of all societies. However, I wish to emphasize a characterization of Hindu society as a "field society" distinct from Western cultures which might be called "particle societies."¹⁹ These terms are borrowed from physics but provide a useful metaphorical model for a distinction in the definition of boundaries between self and community. I define "field" to represent the psycho-social space and not in the Lewinian sense.

Kurt Lewin defined the field as, "the totality of coexisting facts which are conceived of as mutually interdependent". The three major components of Lewin's theory include the statements, "1. Behavior is a function of the field which exists at the time the behavior occurs; 2. Analysis begins with the situation as a whole from which are differentiated the component parts, and 3. The concrete person in a concrete situation can be represented mathematically".²⁰ The field for a Hindu is predetermined in

the sense that he comes into this world with the imprint of past karma. The home in which he is born, the nature of his parents, etc., is preordained. Since the field consists of many persons in the family, the individual's position is determined. Thus, the field creates a place for the individual. He is expected, through his actions, to maintain continuity from generation to generation. The field acts as a facilitator in presenting a model of behaviour. These paradigms are reinforced by exposing individuals to "ideal" patterns of behaviour as expounded in mythology. It is obvious that in such a system the ultimate goal is to be accepted by the family and experience a sense of belongingness. According to Lasker, in a field system the individual sense of self is not personally generated by derives from the collective expectation of others.²¹ There is a substantial elaboration of social capacities to "read" the wishes of others and locate oneself in the field. this requires the suppression of selfhood and denial of one's own needs. Self-sacrifice for the good of all becomes an ideology. Given all these conditions, the field acts as a support system for the individual and the absence of such support can create basic anxiety. The virtue of a field system is that if the primary object such as the father or the mother is absent there are others who can take over that role. This, however, depends upon the ability of the individual to utilize the resources of the field. If he isolates himself, no matter what the reason, the support will

not be available. At the same time the individual experiences guilt for isolating himself.

We have noted that in a field system the facilitating agents are provided by the field. During the course of the life cycle changes take place in the individual. This also changes the field which has to provide a new modality by means of transformation. Thus the field becomes the unit of transformation. Implicit in this whole discussion is the fact that relationships are highly important in the Hindu context. In the psychological literature, one finds frequent mention of the mother-child relationship. Scant reference is made concerning the significance of fathers. In the Indian context Roland has mentioned the term "sympiotic reciprocity" to describe the intimate nature of the mother-child relationship.²² For a Hindu these relationships are significant but do not cover the whole gamut of experiences. The degree of dependency and intimacy relates to certain placement in the social nexus. A Hindu measures the relationship parameters along a family paradigm, and the relationship with a person is assessed in terms of the degree of intimacy one can achieve with the person as well as how much one can ask of (depend upon) the other person. It is by these criteria that one finds one's place in the society. Many subtle nuances of intimacy and dependency are explained in the forms. The term "dependency" carries a pejorative connotation in the Western context, but for a Hindu it is

only natural that the family should depend upon the head of the household. The guru expects the disciple to depend upon him. Both will feel offended if it were not so. thus, intimacy implies merger as well as transformation.

In these relationships, one becomes aware that multi-level transactions are taking place all the time. Family, communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is based upon the hierarchical positions of various members. Different permissible and forbidden behaviours determine the individual's place in the family matrix. To function in such a field an individual has to develop a high degree of sensitivity to the various interacting forces within the field which Roland terms as "radar sensitivity."²³ This is not a cognitive exercise, nor an information processing device. It is hypothesized that in such a system the field has the knowledge which is made available to the individual. In order to benefit from it he has to develop certain competences which are intertwined with the social values. In such a system, an individual's identity is a continuous reconfiguration of oneself in an interpersonal matrix.

The hierararchical position in the family nexus has been referred to earlier. Roland has described the nature of this in elaborate detail.²⁴ Individual behaviour is determined by one's position within the hierararchy. Desai comments:

The boundaries around such a self are built by limitation of the personal world, of those in the immediate childhood experiences and by a complex consideration of rules of hierarchy which govern interpersonal transactions.

In such a system emphasis is not on individual selfhood but on the capacity to integrate into the corporate selfhood. an individual, ideally, has to pay less attention to his own affective status. Even if one recognizes a personal affect, its value has to be minimized. One's goal is not personally generated but is derived from the goal of the field. consequently, one has to put one's energy into thinking of strategies to arrive at the derived goals. For Hindus, basic anxieties include fear of loss of support from the field, concern over a sense of not belonging, and shame and guilt for having failed the field. Whether the sense of failure is due to not fulfilling one's obligation or having failed the field, the sense of isolation is similar. In such an event many restorative strategies are available such as participation in religious functions, withdrawal strategy in which purification rituals play a role, meditation leading to transcendental experience, cathartic strategy in which one can participate in group rituals, etc. Irrespective of the particular strategy, the field agents are co-participants with the individual, as Kakar has graphically described.²⁶ The significance of the field as a support system has been amply documented by Marriott,²⁷ Raheja,²⁸ Iden and Nicholas,²⁹ Susan and Lloyd Rudolph.³⁰ Two case reports are presented which illustrate some of the theoretical constructs

described above.

The Case of Mr. T

Mr. T. was referred at the age of twenty-four years by his family physician because of multiple somatic complaints. During the evaluation and subsequent therapy the following facts were revealed. Mr. T. was the younger of two children, a boy and a girl, born in a well-to-do merchant class family. When he was very young his older sister married and had moved to her husband's house. His early childhood was described as happy because he was constantly cared for by his parents and the servants. When he was approximately twelve-years old, his father was diagnosed as suffering from tuberculosis, and was advised to move to a country house so that he could be isolated from the other members of the family. His mother went with him, leaving Mr. T. under the care of the servants. He saw his parents once a week for brief periods when he was taken to visit them. He missed them but was not too unhappy because the paternal aunt, uncle and the servants were very attentive. When he was approximately eighteen years old his father passed away. Following this, the family business was managed by his paternal uncle who became the head of the family. Unfortunately, the uncle also died six months later. Mr. T. then became the head of the household consisting of his widowed mother, his widowed aunt with her two small children. By then he was married and his young bride came to

live with the family. In addition he had the responsibility of the family business about which he knew very little. Suddenly Mr. T. was catapulted into several roles for which he was little prepared. Overwhelmed, he attempted to engage his father's cousin as a mentor who could guide him not only in his household responsibilities but also in business affairs. The cousin, however, refused to take on this role. Mr. T. felt as if he was forced to handle multiple obligations without any guidance or adequate preparation.

When he came to see me he had established a very constricted life style for himself. He had an almanac which indicated the auspicious and inauspicious hours for every day of the week for all twelve months in the year. He had to fit all his business, social and other transactions according to this daily calendar. In practice, this meant that he had to leave home to go to the shop at a particular hour and return home according to a rigid schedule. He had to buy and sell according to planetary injunctions. Since he was not familiar with the trade he depended upon his employees to look after the business. At this appointed time he would go to the shop, sit for the fixed number of hours and return home. While in the shop he would invite neighboring shopkeepers for tea and pass the time in idle gossip. They would oblige by coming, sitting for a while and then would go about their business. During the course of the day there would be four or five visitors who took advantage of his

hospitality without compromising their own business. Very soon the employees also fitted into this pattern by humoring their employer and conducting minimal business.

Being of shy temperament, Mr. T. socialized minimally. His time constraints also impeded socialization leaving him to his own resources most of the time. While at home he did not have the companionship of the women because they would be busy with household chores. He spent time listening to taped religious discourses and reading philosophical literature. By the time he came to see me he was the father of a son. There was an unspoken family myth that the fathers would die at an early age after having a male progeny. This was true of his father and his uncle both of whom had only sons.

He began to realize that the once prosperous business was not faring so well. He was making profits, but barely enough to take care of the needs of the family. He wanted to expand his business after seeing others do so, but did not know how to accomplish this goal. Meanwhile, the demands of the family were increasing as the children grew up. He was not only a father but the guardian of two other children. All these pressures made him increasingly anxious. This stress was manifested by sleeplessness and stomach ailments. Mr. T. suffered constipation which itself made him anxious. He had a veritable pharmacy at home consisting of both Western medicines and Ayurvedic (indigenous) drugs. In

addition, he was very selective about eating "hot" and "cold" foods according to the Ayurvedic theories of health. Finally he had involved himself in religious and philosophical pursuits to the exclusion of all other activities appropriate to his age.

This case highlights some of the cultural factors which may have an impact on Hindu individual development. the first and the most important issue is the lack of field support during his growing years to facilitate his development according to the stages of the life cycle. He was brought up in total dependency, his parents not anticipating the future events. Ordinarily, in such families children are indulged but are also exposed to the various family rituals. They learn the family trade by active participation from a very young age. Mr. R. was physically separated from his parents, denying him the opportunity of learning by emulation. Because of the father's illness, Mr. R. had only minimal participation in social and religious functions. If the uncle had lived longer he would have been a role model and teacher. His death left a vacuum which Mr. T. attempted to fill with his father's cousin. When the latter refused this responsibility, Mr. T. was left without any "shaping" agents in the field. His mother and wife could only fulfill their obligation of carrying on the household responsibilities and, perhaps, some of the family traditions. The relationship was awkward because they made demands on him

as the head of the household without taking into consideration his lack of competence to fill the role. In his work world his employees looked for leadership and when they perceived the lack of it, they also became passively incompetent. Increasingly, Mr. T. became aware of his incompetence which resulted in a negative self-perception. The only way he could avoid being confronted with situations he could not handle was by fulfilling minimal obligations and insulating himself from interactions. The almanac provided him with a legitimate rationale consistent with the cultural beliefs for limiting his life style. The only way he could maintain a semblance of positive self-image was by priding himself on his erudition in philosophical and religious matters. This also acted as a restorative strategy to minimize his anxiety. Under the ordinary circumstances I predict that he would have gone on this way until he came upon a guru who would have fulfilled all his unmet psychological and emotional needs. As an epilogue to this narrative I may add that Mr. T. was in treatment for a period of six years. I was not only a therapist but also acted as a mentor and thus was seen as the fulfilling guru. By the time we had terminated our contract, Mr. T. was the proud father of two more children, a son and a daughter, putting the family myth to rest once and for all. He had put away his almanac and had expanded his business considerably.

The therapeutic process involved several phases.

Initially, a dependent relationship was allowed to evolve over a period of time. During this phase Mr. T. would bring to the sessions issues of day to day concerns. The involved decisions regarding his business or minor family problems. Most of the time he would make decisions on his own after exploring all the aspects during the sessions. Occasionally, I would have to offer direct suggestions. In a sense he was using me as a father surrogate, not in the transferenceal sense. When he realized the positive outcome of his decisions he felt encouraged and his self esteem improved. At this stage he was ready to introspect regarding his interpersonal transactional patterns. He could accept interpretations without experiencing anxiety. He was able to acknowledge the inner rage which was at the root of his difficulties. He was ready to recognize the ambivalences in his relationship with his mother, his wife and even his children without feeling annihilated because of the negative feelings. The burden of guilt was gradually reduced. The fear of death of which he was not aware began to surface and he was able to talk about it. With the reduction of the castration anxiety he was able to be more assertive in his interpersonal relationships. He could take new initiative which, not only resulted in increased financial returns, but also contributed to a new status among his business associates. An indirect impact of all this was greater productivity on the part of his employees. His social activities, inevitably, increased. In this process his

dependency on the almanacs began to be reduced until he had no need for it. The final phase was used to consolidate the gains he had made. As an epilogue I may mention that I had an opportunity to confirm that Mr. T. was doing well five years after the termination of treatment.

This account would be incomplete without a psychodynamic explanation of Mr. T's psychopathology. In the early years the parents were very indulgent which had resulted in Mr. T's helplessness, and, at the same time increasing sense of impotence. The reason for this was because he was not permitted to do anything on his own. He was even spoonfed by the servants until the age of eleven. He was not permitted to go out and play with friends for fear that he might get hurt. This resulted in a conviction on his part that he could not cope with life's demands on his own, and this feeling was reinforced by the adults around him. There was no scope for his experiencing his specific place in the family matrix. It must be mentioned that in spite of the field expecting that an individual function within a network of relationships, there is still scope for an individual to have psychological space in which he can evaluate his own values and determine his goals consistent with the family goals. Mr. T. was left in a psychological vacuum by the loss of significant objects when his identity was being formulated and crystallized. The reality was so painful that he experienced a great deal of anxiety. This was compounded by

the secret fear of his own death as indicated in the family myth. Even minor indispositions were perceived as precursors to serious illness. The feedback from the people around him was continuously negative. In order to experience some self-affirmation he was constantly condoning other people's disrespectful behaviour, which gave him a feeling of self-righteousness. Over a period of time, however, he began to realize that he was being exploited. This provoked a great deal of anger, but because of his sense of vulnerability he suppressed it to a great extent. He also avoided placing himself in conflictual situations for fear of being hurt. For example, he avoided travelling great distances from home. this fear had three distinct components. One was that of being involved in a scuffle with co-passengers while travelling by train in which he would be hurt. In order to understand this fear one has to be familiar with train travel in India. As trains are overcrowded there is a lot minute scramble for seats in the unreserved compartments. Even if a seat is reserved an aggressive passenger can claim it as his own. Mr. T., as he saw himself, was unable to defend his seat. Secondly, he was afraid of being robbed in a strange city, without any resources to return home. Also, there would be no one to turn to in case of an emergency (the nature of which was never clearly defined).

It is obvious that Mr. T. perceived himself as vulnerable in a hostile environment. This reflects

considerable disturbance in early object relations. given his experience of being totally protected up to a certain point, and then suddenly being abandoned without any inner resources, is no wonder that Mr. T. felt so helpless. As Erikson has pointed out, "Now, to have somebody to 'look up to' in general, and in a variety of settings, to recognize and be recognized in a ritualized manner remains a basic need of a human being throughout his life."³¹ This is more so in the case of a Hindu family when field agents are resources when one moves on in the life cycle. Mr. T. came for professional help with a feeling of despair. During therapy he could experience a sense of support which enabled him to mobilize his marginal ego capacities to achieve in all areas. He was able to evolve strategies to improve his business. He was able to assert his leadership in such a way that his employees became more productive. He was also able to weed out and fire inefficient staff. The monetary returns were the best testimony to his efficient functioning. All this enhanced his position in the social group. He had no further reason to isolate himself which resulted in increased socialization. He was no more a slave of the almanac but became aware that he himself was the arbiter of his future. All this resulted in developing a positive self image. Once he reached this stage he could be more realistic about his aspirations and more pragmatic in his dealings. He continued participation in rituals; they were not a defensive maneuver but a meaningful performance of life-cycle tasks.

The Case of Ms. R.

The case of Ms. R. represents a different vignette of a Hindu woman who had to negotiate her way in a traditional household, which, over a period of time, was passing through change of revolutionary proportions. When she was first referred to me she was twenty-one and single. After completing undergraduate studies she was contemplating going to graduate school when a series of physical ailments intervened which forced her to stay at home for a period of time. The family was expecting that, according to custom, she would marry and become a housewife. Ms. R., however, had other ideas. None of these could be accomplished because she developed various fears--the most prominent of which was fear of travel. This kept her housebound and gradually, she became totally housebound and socially isolated. Increasing depression and self-destructive thoughts precipitated her referral.

Ms. R. was one of two children born into a prosperous and socially prominent family. All the members of the extended family were successful professional people except her father. In spite of it he had a respected place in the household, and his bride came from an equally well-to-do and respectable family. Ms. R., being the first grandchild, was the favourite of all and enjoyed a life of ease and luxury.

Due to various circumstances her parents had to establish an independent household when Ms. R. was in her early teens. This changed the whole field structure because the father became the head of the household without the necessary competence. This necessitated the mother's going back to school to prepare herself for employment so that she could help support the family. This took her away from home most of the time when Ms. R. was going through much emotional turmoil as a process of growing up. Ms. R., whose mother had been available constantly during her childhood, found that she had to cope with her teenage anxieties by herself since she could not share them with her father. Since this was a traditional family she did not have much freedom of movement and she had no close friends in whom to confide.

By the time she had reached her late teens, the mother had completed her education and entered full time employment. In fact, she became the major source of family income. This also kept her away from home for the most of the day. By then the close relationship between the mother and daughter was diluted. Ms. R., realizing that she had led a sheltered life all those years, wanted a different experience. also, the pressure for marriage was mounting. She did not want to be constrained to a restricted life so soon. Much against their will she prevailed upon them to send her to a college. Entry into college was a totally new experience. Up till then she had studied in a girl's school, and joining a co-

educational institution was overwhelming. For the first time she was not under constant supervision. She saw other boys and girls interact with great freedom. This particular college was known for its educational excellence and also for its unconventional freedom. Many students found it to be a fashion to be non-conformist in their dress and behavior. Mr. R. found that young people aspired to different intellectual pursuits and a non-traditional life style. Nevertheless, due to her upbringing, she could only marginally participate in their activities. She concentrated on her studies and did very well. As was inevitable, she became emotionally involved with a young man. In her naivete, she expected this to be a serious relationship ending in marriage. The young man had other ideas and his ardour cooled towards her. She began to develop various psychosomatic symptoms and was barely able to complete the academic year. She left college and stayed home thinking that it would be for a temporary period of convalescence. Unfortunately, this was not a brief period and extended into almost a year. The family again started to seriously arrange a marriage. Without definitely informing them of her reluctance to marry, she went on rejecting one suitor after another. This is unheard of in an Indian, especially Hindu, family. It is the relative privilege of the young man to make the choice and not that of a young woman. After some time no more offers came and the prospects of marriage became remote. The parents also gave up making any attempts since

they did not want any more humiliation. Ms. R. recovered her health and began to go to work. This brought her into contact with people who considered themselves avant-garde. She became exposed to unconventional life styles and adopted them with a vengeance. This further alienated her from her family. After initial attempts to bring her in step, they gave her up as a lost cause. They did not approve of the people she met and the company she kept. It appeared as if she did not care, and this is important to keep in mind if we want to understand her dilemma. During this period she met a young man of a different caste. It started as a platonic relationship since both shared common interests. Over a period of time she began to love him and contemplated marriage. Without asking him she had assumed that he reciprocated her feelings. The parents were not too happy about the choice but gave their consent thinking that a conventional marriage was out of the question. When she proposed to the young man his response was equivocal. Gradually, he began to distance himself from her. Finally, when she confronted him for a definite commitment he made it clear that he had no intention of marrying her. This was a severe psychological trauma and resulted in a depressive illness which brought her to my attention.

Ms. R.'s case represents a situation in which many cultural factors lend a unique quality to her personality development, her symptom formation and the resolution of her

conflicts. The most important issues are those of role reversal, isolation and intimacy. Both her parents came from traditional but successful families. After separating from the extended family her father's limitations became apparent. This necessitated her mother taking up a career in which she became highly successful. In spite of this the father was given due deference as the head of the household, although there was an unspoken understanding of his limited role. Such a situation is not infrequent in Hindu families. I have encountered many instances in which mothers, because of their greater competence, would take over the decision making role and the fathers would willingly give up their status. Such an arrangement worked out as long as the mother stayed at home and the father was the de facto breadwinner. In Ms. R.'s case the father had literally to take a subordinate role. His own sense of failure made him set up exacting standards for the children both in academic performance and general behavior. Both the parents shared a common interest in the religious area. Both were strong believers and found companionship in shared rituals. They had strong views about male-female relationships and sexual mores which were transmitted to the children in no uncertain terms. When she left home to go to a residential undergraduate school she was exposed to a life style totally alien to her. In this new environment she became aware of her suppressed sexual needs. These, however, overwhelmed her because she did not know how to cope with them. She made attempts to establish

heterosexual relationships without sexual overtones. She soon realized that men viewed such relationships differently. This realization in itself was a shock since she had learned to accept that her values were universal. Torn between her sexual needs and superego prohibitions she developed physical ailments which, after a time, totally incapacitated her, forcing her to return home. This provided a safe haven in her turmoil. At the same time it also meant that she would have to observe the traditional code of behavior. After being exposed to a relatively free milieu she could not reconcile herself to a restricted life style. Being an attractive and intelligent girl, coming from a respected family background, she had no shortage of suitors. If she had agreed she could have ended up marrying a young man desirable by any standards. Since she had decided upon making all major decisions herself without interference from her family, she did not avail herself of the field resources. This alienated her from the field which, as I have described earlier, left her to her own resources. Her experimentation with a bohemian life style brought her face-to-face with different sexual and ideological mores. She could only superficially adopt the new life style without being able to identify with it. In choosing a young man for marriage, she made the very first decision of her life. Unfortunately, he did not believe in any permanent commitment. When he refused her offer the narcissistic injury was too painful. It was as if the reality was too painful to cope with and she reacted

by total withdrawel from all social contacts. She ended up at home, an environment which she had tried so hard to escape. She could have utilized many culturally available reparative measures. Since she had disallowed allegiance to traditional values she could not make use of them. The family was physically available to her, but since they could not understand her, their ability to help her was limited. Thus we see an individual, a product of one set of values, trying to adopt a different ideology and finding herself without any moorings. According to the theoretical frame of reference presented, she could not use the codes the culture provided because she rejected the symbol systems.

As the treatment proceeded she began to reidentify with the values whe had given up. She even went to a guru to regain a sense of belongingness. The reconciliation with the family was facilitated by the fact that they fully cooperated by being constantly available. They were also willing to reexamine their actions and behavior which had resulted in this unfortunate interlude in their daughter's life. Some time after the treatment ended Ms. R. went through a traditional marriage. Although the young man was of her own choice, parents on both sides approved of the choice.

From all accounts Ms. R. had a very protective childhood. In a large household there were many caretakers.

Her mother, however, was not available as much as she demanded because of the mother being busy with the household chores as happens in a traditional Hindu family. Also being the only daughter-in-law at the time she had more than her share of responsibilities. Her mother-in-law was a demanding person and the mother was afraid of her. It is possible that the mother took upon more than she could manage to please the mother-in-law. Ms. K. had anticipated greater intimacy with the mother when the family separated from the joint household. Since the mother had to go back to school and later to work even this wish was not fulfilled. It is interesting that during the acute phase of her loneliness she would not leave the mother out of her sight so much so that the mother had to stay away from work almost for a year. She blamed the father for not fulfilling his legitimate role which required the mother to go to work and be away from home. She was very angry at both parents but could not express it. Going away to school represented two different emotions. She wanted to create a distance between herself and her parents who had failed her. Also this was her first attempt to establish her own individuality. As explained earlier this did not work out. After returning home she attempted to show anger by defying parental values. She was not ready and prepared for the new style of life she had selected for herself. After a short acting out phase her dependency needs came once more to the fore and her regression was total. Both literally and figuratively she

had returned to the womb. When I went to see her in her house, since she could not travel, she had isolated herself in her room with the door and windows closed. Meals were brought to her room and she had minimal communication with her family members. This arrangement had gone on for months. The parents felt helpless since she was not willing to seek psychiatric help. Prayers were the last resort until a family friend brought me into the picture.

Summary and conclusions:

Many theories of personality development are based upon observations of Western nuclear households where ideals of individuation, setting goals for oneself and aggressively pursuing them, are highly valued. The Freudian model, Erikson's epigenetic theory, and later Object Relations theory all, in one way or another, have this as a basic frame of reference. The model presented here of the Hindu society is different. In such a society the individual is a part of the corporate system, the whole system determining his goals and sharing his destiny. He, on his part, strives to maintain his place within the family and the community by following the traditions allowing for continuity from generation to generation. The collective wisdom of the family is available to him to facilitate his growth and development. This should not be construed as a total merger of his individuality without any scope for individual

self-expression. Once he has fulfilled his obligations to the family and jati he can aspire to his own perfectibility. The system recognizes such aspirations and provides various codes for achieving the same. In order to achieve mutual aims, certain harmony in relationships is essential. This is accomplished by developing a high degree of sensitivity to others, and the individual has to subordinate his own needs for the good of the whole system. This does not mean that there cannot exist a dissonance between the individual needs and the expectations of the family and the community. Except under extreme situations where such dissonance leads to rupture in interpersonal relationships, various restorative strategies are available in times of crises. This presupposes two basic premises: ability of the field to be supportive and act as a competent facilitating agent, and the individual's competence to use the field agents. In the two case reports presented we see an illustration of the failure of both components. In the case of Mr. T. the field agents were absent, and in Ms. R.'s case they failed in their obligations, resulting in her withdrawal from them. Without such support both determined their own strategies to cope which were maladaptive.

A larger issue which emerges is how such field societies respond to change. No one denies that vast changes are taking place in Hindu society. Different theories have been presented about how the society is adapting to these changes.

They include Srinivas's concept of "sanskritization" and "secularization," ³² Singer's "compartmentalization" and "vicarious ritualization," ³³ Marriott's "parochialization," ³⁴ Redfield and Singer's "universalization, etc.," ³⁵ Hindu society has been flexible enough to adapt to historical imperatives over millenia. This, however, was possible because changes took place gradually over a period of time. Current changes are taking place too rapidly for such adaptivity. Social changes have not yet, however, caused massive cultural disruption.

Individuals, however, are experiencing varying degrees of discomfort. This varies from minor problems to extreme degrees of anxiety. As Erikson has commented,

Some periods in history become identity vacua caused by three basic forms of human apprehension: fears aroused by new facts such as discoveries and inventions (including weapons), which radically change and expand the whole world image; anxieties aroused by symbolic dangers vaguely perceived as a consequence of the decay of existing ideologies; and in the wake of disintegrating faith, the dread of an existential abyss devoid of spiritual meaning. ³⁶

The average Hindu is undisturbed by the change since his faith and ideology have not been shaken. He is quite content to benefit from modern technology without being encumbered by its oppressive domination. He is happy to enjoy it without self-consciousness. Nandi explains this phenomenon as, "I suspect that a clue to this contradiction lies also in the Indian concept of temporally and spatially embedded norms.

These norms allow one to live with positions which seem totally contradictory to each other or may both be derivable from an overreaching principle." ³⁷ Of course he is referring to the concept of desa, kala and guna which we have already discussed. It is those Hindus who are torn between traditionalism and modernism who are haunted by the spectre of "identity vacua." This is because modernity is equated with rationality and traditionalism is seen as blind superstition. It is those who cannot manage "compartmentalization" satisfactorily who experience conflict. In the Hindu society today it is not totally an "existential abyss," but a continuing effort to find a meaning of human existence in a world of different values, a world in which the sense of "we-self regard" has to give place to "self-regard" alone.

Notes

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